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START Proposal July 1982

Background: On May 9, 198[illegible] President Reagan announced a new proposal to reduce substantially the nuclear arsenals of both the US and the Soviet Union to equal levels and to reduce the threat of nuclear war. The negotiations, which began on June 29, are called START (Strategic Arms Reduction Talks)--to emphasize the President's goal of nuclear weapons reductions and to signify a break from the unratified SALT II Treaty.

The President's initiative has opened the door to a more constructive relationship with the USSR. Such a relationship, however, can be built only on reciprocity and mutual restraint. Arms control is an important instrument for securing such restraint. Equitable and verifiable agreements, when combined with sound foreign and defense policies, can play a critical role in enhancing deterrence and insuring a stable military balance.

US arms control objectives: The President has outlined the objectives of US arms control policy:

- Substantial reductions. We seek to reduce the number and destructive potential of nuclear weapons, not just to cap them at high levels as in previous agreements.

- Equality. We seek agreements that will lead to mutual reductions to equal levels in both sides' forces. The US will accept nothing less.

- Security. We seek agreements that will enhance US and allied security and reduce the risk of war.

- Verifiability. We will carefully design the provisions of arms control agreements and insist on measures to insure that both sides comply. Otherwise, neither side will have the confidence needed to accept the deep reductions we seek.

START negotiations: To enhance deterrence and insure a stable nuclear balance, the President's proposal focuses, in the first phase of negotiations, on significant reductions in ballistic missile warheads and deployed ballistic missiles. This would halt and reverse the destabilizing growth in ballistic missile warhead numbers that would have been permitted under the flawed and thus unratified SALT II Treaty. In this first phase, we will seek to reduce the number of ballistic missile warheads by at least one-third, to about 5,000. No more than half the remaining ballistic missile warheads will be on land-based missiles. We also will seek to cut the total number of all ballistic missiles to an equal level, about one-half the current US level.

In the second phase, we will seek further reductions to equal ceilings on other elements of strategic forces, particularly ballistic missile

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throw-weight. Throw-weight is an important measure of the size and destructive potential of ballistic missiles. First-phase reductions will reduce the current disparity in ballistic missile throw-weight and lay the groundwork for the second-phase reductions to achieve an equal throw-weight ceiling below current US levels.

Relationship to SALT: The President's START proposal has built upon the experience of the SALT process. It is US policy to take no action that would undercut existing agreements, provided the Soviets exercise equal restraint. We believe this policy can contribute to a positive atmosphere for START negotiations. However, the Reagan Administration will not pursue ratification of SALT II for three broad reasons:

- First, the treaty has specific flaws. These include the perpetuation and codification of dangerous, destabilizing asymmetries, illustrated by a unilateral Soviet advantage of 308 modern, heavy ICBMs. It contains several ambiguities, particularly with respect to provisions for verification. It permitted force expansion and did not achieve force reductions--it is possible that the Soviet ICBM forces alone could have grown to more than 8,000 warheads under SALT II.

- Because of these and other shortcomings, SALT II never achieved the broad national support that a treaty of this importance must have. Even before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, there was a divisive debate on the merits of the treaty. Attempting to ratify SALT II now would only reopen that controversial debate--at a time when a broad consensus behind the President's proposal is needed and when we should focus our full attention on achieving substantial reductions.

- Finally, formalizing the SALT II Treaty would make achievement of the President's goals for START more difficult by establishing unacceptable precedents for a future agreement. For example, Soviet Backfire bombers are not included in an equal treatment of bombers, and heavy missiles are treated in a manner inconsistent with our plans for START. These and other provisions would have to be changed later in START. While our policy of not undercutting the general limitations of SALT II would not impede progress during START, codifying them most certainly would.

A reasonable approach: The main threat to the strategic balance has been the massive Soviet buildup of ballistic missile forces. Because of their large size, increasing accuracy, and short flight times, these missiles (and particularly land-based ICBMs) pose a significant threat to US deterrent forces. The President's START proposal attempts to reduce the threat of nuclear war by enhancing deterrence and securing a stable nuclear balance.

The President's approach is reasonable and equitable. It would lead to significant reductions to equal levels on both sides and thus to a more stable nuclear balance, which should be in the interest not only of the US and the USSR but of the entire world. The President has emphasized our intention to negotiate in good faith and to consider all serious proposals from the Soviets.

Norm Howard, Editor, 632-0736